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HIGHLAND FALLS — Rep. John Hall came to James I. O'Neill High School Monday, with news he's secured \$800,000 for the struggling district in the fiscal 2010 federal budget. The money is for science and technology upgrades in this school year.

Hall said the money equals more than half of the Highland Falls-Fort Montgomery School District's annual budget shortfall.

School board Vice President Anne Lawless called the aid "fantastic," but noted that because the aid is targeted for specific items, it won't make a huge dent in the overall shortfall.

Hall said he's continuing to work on a long-term solution to that problem, which occurs because the district can tax only about 7 percent of its land.

The rest is owned either by the federal government (West Point) or the state. The district has been fighting for years to be what it calls fairly compensated for its inability to tax that land.

Hall said he's trying to raise or eliminate the cap that limits how much the federal government can help. He also suggested that finding an alternative to property taxes to fund education would help. "We need to get to the point where this is not a yearly crisis," Hall said.

District officials are grateful for the \$800,000.

Elementary teacher Kristen Magyar said the money will be used to obtain everything from digital cameras and microscopes to podcasting capability.

Hall, a former Saugerties school board president, said students are "less likely to pursue (technology) at the college level if they don't have (the tools) at the high-school level."

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<<1-12-10 District gets \$800K from feds (Times Herald-Record).pdf>>

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